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ABSTRACT

This report presents the recommendations of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) concerning issues in data collection on school exit status. Of major concern were: (1) the high proportion of students exiting with status unknown, (2) the extreme state-to-state variability in reports of basis of exit, and (3) the incomparability of the OSEP data with other sources of information on high school completers and dropouts. The following recommendations are given: (1) add a count of students who died; (2) alter the definition of a dropout to include students not currently enrolled who did not exit through defined bases; (3) add a count of students who returned to regular education; (4) alter the definition of graduation with a certificate to include students who received a General Education Diploma through a secondary school program; (5) eliminate the category previously called "status unknown" and replace with "moved, not known to be continuing"; (6) use the December 1 child count from the previous year as the denominator in computing rates; and (7) change the time period covered by data collection from September to June to December 1 to November 30. Attachments include descriptions of current dropout and graduation statistics and a draft of proposed instructions and forms for collecting exiting data. (DB)

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FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE

OSEP TASK FORCE FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF DATA ON SCHOOL EXIT STATUS

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March 1991

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Since 1984-85, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has been collecting data from States on the number of students with disabilities exiting the educational system by age, disability, and basis of exit (graduation with a diploma, graduation with a certificate, reached maximum age, dropped out, or exited with status unknown). In light of developments in regular education including new indicators of school completion and new goals regarding graduation rates, OSEP felt that it was appropriate to examine the quality of their exiting data and identify ways of modifying the data collection in order that it would better serve policy makers and practitioners. Three issues that concerned OSEP were 1) the high proportion of students exiting with status unknown, 2) the extreme State-to-State variability in reports of basis of exit, and 3) the incomparability of the OSEP data with other sources of information on high school completers and dropouts.

Background

Following the Charlottesville Summit, the President and Governors announced a set of educational goals for the nation. One of the goals was to increase the percentage of students graduating from high school to at least 90 percent by the year 2000. Many questions about the indicators used to measure progress toward attaining that goal remain unanswered.

Several attempts are underway to improve the quality of educational indicators. The National Forum on Education Statistics[1], has recently published its first set of recommendations entitled, *A Guide to Improving the National Education Data System.* Regarding outcome data, the Forum recommends that the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in cooperation with State departments of education, should obtain and periodically report comparable State-by-State data on school dropouts and completers by race/ethnicity, sex, and other important subgroups. The Forum recommends that wherever possible, existing measures and data collection instruments should be used. In general, the Forum feels that improving current instruments and systems to provide additional information or to provide comparable data at the State and National levels should take priority over development of another set of instruments or systems and that improvements should focus on better coordination of existing national surveys.

Currently, data on high school completers and dropouts are collected and published by NCES, the Census Bureau, the Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation, and the Office of Special Education Programs (see attachment A for descriptions of each data collection). However, each data collection effort has a unique set of definitions, and uses denominators to calculate rates or percentages that make figures used by OSEP and the other federal agencies incomparable. These differences,

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[1]The Hawkins-Stafford Education Amendments of 1988 mandated a Federal-State partnership to collect and report education statistics under the auspices of NCES. The National Forum on Education Statistics, the primary mechanism for implementing those goals, is composed of nearly a hundred individuals representing Federal, State, and local education agencies as well as other groups with an interest in education data.

along with questions about the quality of the State-reported data collected by OSEP, have raised concern among OSEP staff. Below is a brief description of the OSEP data collection followed by a description of the new NCES dropout data.

Data Comparability

Each year, in accordance with Section 618 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, OSEP collects data from States on the number of students with disabilities age 14 and older exiting the educational system. The data are collected by disability and basis of exit:

> **Graduation with diploma** includes students who exited an educational program through receipt of a high school diploma identical to that for which non-disabled students are eligible.
>
> **Graduation with certificate** includes students who exited an educational program through receipt of a certificate of completion, modified diploma, fulfillment of an IEP, or some similar mechanism.
>
> **Reached maximum age for service** includes students who exited the educational system as a consequence of reaching the maximum age for receipt of special education services and did not receive a diploma/certificate of completion.
>
> **Dropped out** includes students who exited the educational system as a consequence of dropping out of school--special education students who formally withdrew from school without completing the educational program. If no information is available as to whether a student has dropped out, the student should be reported in Status Unknown.
>
> **Status unknown** includes students who exited the educational system but specific causes of departure could not be determined or were not known. Students who moved and are known to be continuing in school should not be included.

NCES is currently field testing a new data collection and reporting process to measure the number and rate of dropouts. NCES defines a dropout as an individual who:

- was enrolled in school at some time in the previous school year;
- was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year;
- has not graduated from high school or completed a State- or district-approved educational program; and
- does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:

- transfer to another public school district, private school, or State- or district-approved education program;

- temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or

- death.

NCES is also pilot testing three different denominators for calculating dropout proportions: student membership counts at the beginning of the school year, at the end of the school year, and in the fall of the following school year.

In comparing the OSEP exiting data with the NCES data, two factors stand out as particularly problematic: 1) requiring that students formally withdraw in order to be counted as dropouts (the current OSEP practice), and 2) using the total number of exiters as the denominator in computing dropout and graduation rates when NCES uses total membership.

Data Quality

Several OSEP funded studies have uncovered inconsistencies in the OSEP exiting data. One study of three California districts found that of 62 students reported as exiting with status unknown, no more than two had left the educational system at all (MacMillan, 1990). In a second study Westat researchers found that several States were erroneously reporting students who returned to regular education as status unknown exiters. As a result, in one State, 59 percent of exiters were reported under status unknown. The study uncovered several additional causes for the excessive State variation in exiting reports. First, States differ in minimum competency test requirements and those tests appear to decrease the percentage of students with disabilities exiting with a standard diploma (although this would not influence dropout statistics). Second, although the current OSEP definition of a dropout should include only students who officially withdraw, many States report students who did not officially withdraw in their OSEP dropout counts. These States, on average, report 4 percent more dropouts than States reporting only formal withdrawals (Westat, 1990).

OSEP Exiting Task Force

OSEP constituted a task force to discuss issues of data quality and comparability, and to make recommendations for data improvement. The OSEP exiting task force is composed of State directors of special education, university researchers, and representatives of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, NCES, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), and OSEP (see attachment B for a list of the task force members).

The task force discussed many issues before arriving at a set of recommendations for changes to the OSEP data collection. The issues addressed by the group and their subsequent recommendations are described in the remainder of this document.

Are the exiting data important to collect and for what purposes?

Given the development of a new dropout data collection by NCES, the task force considered whether the OSEP exiting data were still necessary and if so, for what purposes. While recognizing the burden associated with the OSEP data collection the task force felt there were several factors that justified that burden. The most compelling reason for continuing the OSEP data collection is that the data are not duplicative. None of the other Federal data on dropout and completion rates have the specificity of the OSEP data in identifying and describing the exiting status of students with disabilities. While the NCES dropout figure and several other Federal dropout or graduation figures may include students with disabilities, a separate rate is not computed for disabled and non-disabled students. Since disability was not included among demographic data on respondents, a breakdown by disabled and non-disabled respondents is not possible. Therefore, the NCES data, as well as other sources of information, are inadequate for assessing the extent to which students with disabilities are meeting the national goal set forth by the Governors and the President at the Charlottesville summit, or for measuring the success of regular and special education programs in serving students with disabilities.

On a more regulatory level, the Secretary is required under Section 618 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to obtain data on the number of children and youth with disabilities exiting the educational system each year through program completion or other means, by disability category and age. The act does not require that the data be collected through a State reporting system. However, they must be reported annually for each State. Special studies drawing on a representative sample of students with disabilities in each State are also an option. There are some drawbacks associated with special studies; they may be subject to their own sources of sampling or non-sampling error, they would still require local level data collection, and they are impractical for data that will be collected on a routine basis since most States already collect these data for their own purposes..

In addition to Congressional reports on the implementation of IDEA, the OSEP data are also used to target special studies. OSEP has used the exiting data to identify students with particular disabilities as being at risk of dropping out of school and has funded several dropout prevention projects to design programs capable of retaining these at-risk students. The OSEP exiting data are also used in conjunction with other State-reported special education data to generate and test theories about special education programs. In that regard, the exiting data are just one piece of a rich data source provided by the States to OSEP on students with disabilities, the staff that serve these students, and the settings in which the services are provided.

Can OSEP collect data of sufficient quality to justify the burden of data collection and meet the needs of policy makers and practitioners?

The task force discussed whether it is possible to collect exiting data of sufficient quality to be useful to policy makers and practitioners and justify the burden associated with the collection. The studies mentioned earlier found the exiting data to be inaccurate in many cases, and inconsistent from State to State. Specific problems with the exiting data and possible solutions for those problems were discussed.

The task force felt that having 17 percent of exiters leave with status unknown is a serious threat to the validity of the data. Having one State report almost 60 percent of their exiters leaving through status unknown is unacceptable. Optimally, OSEP would like to account for the educational status of each student with disabilities. While the task force recognizes that this may not be feasible, they believe the number of students unaccounted for should be as small as possible.

According to current OSEP instructions, the status unknown count should include students who moved and were not known to be continuing their education, students who died, students who exited for other or unknown reasons, and students who stopped attending school but did not officially withdraw. The State with the largest number and percentage of students exiting with status unknown is California: 14,182 students or 58.9 percent of the State's total exiters were included in this category. California accounts for 33 percent of the nation's status unknown exiters; Pennsylvania accounts for 15 percent; Illinois--10 percent, and Michigan--6 percent. When the percentage of the nation's exiters leaving through status unknown is recalculated, excluding those four States, the figure drops from 17 percent to 8 percent (Westat, 1990).

Westat tried to uncover reasons for the high number of status unknown exiters in these four States. The common denominator appeared to be the inclusion of students who returned to regular education in counts of exiters. Data managers in three of the four States acknowledged inclusion of students who returned to regular education in their status unknown counts. The fourth State, California, counts students who returned to regular education on their State exiting form, but did not know whether or not, for Federal reporting, those students were being included in the status unknown count. It is possible that the California SEA is reporting these students as status unknown exiters on their Federal form. It is also possible that LEAs are misreporting student exit status (Westat, 1990).

Differences in Federal and State data requirements are central to the reporting problems described in the Westat report. When States try to compile locally submitted data that include elements such as returned to regular education, they may erroneously place these students in the status unknown category. Some States have developed complex crosswalks to convert local and State data into Federal reporting categories. Others may be unable or unwilling to do so, leading to inaccuracy in Federal reporting. States using the same data elements and definitions as specified on the OSEP exiting form report 9.1 percent of exiters in the status unknown category compared to 21.5 percent for States using different data elements.

The disproportionate use of the status unknown category by a few States suggests that the figure does not reflect the actual exiting status of students but may result from differences in reporting practices. Therefore, by providing technical assistance to the States with high status unknown counts and improving the OSEP instructions and forms, the number and percentage of students exiting through status unknown may be significantly reduced. In addition, if many States are collecting data that are more detailed than the OSEP data, including such elements as returned to regular education, perhaps OSEP should consider an appropriate way to both enhance and improve their own data by adding data elements that mirror State reporting requirements. In some cases, the additional burden of revising old data elements or adding new ones to match those collected by States agencies, may be quite small, yet may greatly enhance the quality and value of the exiting data. In each instance, the

task force tried to weigh the costs and benefits of recommended changes to the OSEP data elements to determine if the expected improvement in data justified the additional burden to State and local agencies.

In what ways could the OSEP exiting data be improved to reduce misreporting and make the data more valuable to policy makers?

The task force considered several ways to improve the quality of the OSEP exiting data and to make the data more comparable with NCES dropout data, first, by refining the OSEP data elements, and second, by changing the way the data are analyzed.

The task force believed that to improve the quality of the data, OSEP must reduce the percentage of students reported as exiting with status unknown. Several proposed changes in the data elements were designed, at least in part, to serve this purpose: adding a count of students who died, changing the OSEP definition of a dropout, and adding an exit category for students who returned to regular education. The task force felt that the percentage of students reported as exiting with status unknown should be as small as possible. Therefore, by breaking the category into several smaller categories, the data would be more accurate and more useful to policy makers.

- ***Should OSEP add an exit category for students who died?***

Data from nine States indicate that 0.7 percent of students with disabilities exiting the educational system are accounted for by deaths (Westat, 1990). While this is a relatively small number, the task force felt that it was worthwhile to distinguish these students from those who exited for unknown reasons. Because at least 16 States already collect data on student deaths, the task force felt that the burden associated with the new data element would not be excessive. Furthermore, these exitings are unpreventable and the task force felt they should not be grouped with other exiters because a student death is generally not a reflection an educational success or failure.

- ***Should OSEP adopt the NCES definition of a dropout?***

One reason for the large number of students currently reported to OSEP as status unknown exiters is the exclusionary definition of a dropout used by OSEP. Because students must formally withdraw in order to be considered dropouts, many students who are known to have dropped out of school but who have not withdrawn are recorded as status unknown exiters, as the OSEP instructions require.

In order to get a more accurate view of the dropout problem and make data more comparable with NCES, the task force felt that OSEP should consider an alternative definition of dropouts that was more inclusive, counting students who did not withdraw as well as those that did. The task force recommends adoption of the NCES dropout definition; however, some alterations are necessary to accommodate issues specific to special education and special education data collection. The proposed OSEP definition of a dropout would include students who were enrolled in the previous year, are not currently enrolled, and did not exit through any of the other defined bases.

This differs from the NCES definition in several ways. Students with disabilities who exit by reaching the maximum age for service would not be counted as dropouts under the OSEP definition, but would be counted under the NCES definition. This is a relatively small group of students; in 1988-89, about 2 percent of students with disabilities exiting the educational system did so by reaching the maximum age. However, the task force believed it was important to retain this OSEP exit category and distinguish these students from dropouts since, in effect, the school system is discontinuing service to the students; the students are not choosing to leave the system. One additional difference between the proposed OSEP definition of a dropout and the NCES definition relates to the period of time covered by the data collection. The NCES data cover a school year and the subsequent summer. However, NCES has yet to finalize the precise data collection dates; these issues will be settled following the field test. For several reasons, the task force recommends that the OSEP exiting data cover the period from December 1 of the previous year to November 30 of the current year. Since statute requires a December 1 child count date, the task force felt that a December 1 to November 30 exiting count would not burden the States with an additional data reporting task and would allow for the use of child count as the denominator in computing completion and dropout rates. (This issue is discussed more fully in the section on data analysis.) The task force had no reason to believe that the differences in time span would affect the comparability of the OSEP and NCES data.

- ***Should OSEP add a data element on returned to regular education?***

Several members of the task force felt that as an educational indicator, a count of the number or percentage of students with disabilities returning to regular education would be valuable in assessing the success of special education programs. Other members of the task force pointed out that in some cases, a return to regular education is not a positive outcome. For example, if a parent is unhappy with their child's special education program, they may withdraw the child from special education and return them to regular education. For this reason, the task force recommended the addition of a composite "returned to regular education" data element, but also requested that special studies be undertaken to assess the reasons behind the returns to regular education.

In addition, the research suggests that many of the students reported as status unknown exiters actually returned to regular education. Therefore, it seems that the addition of a returned to regular education data element would reduce the number and percentage of students reported as exiting through status unknown. This, however, would change the focus of the OSEP exiting data, from students exiting the entire educational system to students exiting special education.

At least 20 States are already collecting data on students with disabilities returning to regular education. The use of this datum element at the State level suggests that State-level policy makers find this indicator valuable.

- ***Should the status unknown exit category be renamed?***

If the status unknown category is broken into several parts to distinguish among students who died, returned to regular education, or dropped out, the only students remaining in that category are students who moved and were not known to be continuing their education. The task force discussed the option of either changing the title of the revised status unknown category to more accurately reflect

the composition of students -- moved, not known to be continuing, or eliminating the category altogether. Some task force members felt that there would always be a small group of students whose status was unknown and therefore that the status unknown category should be retained. Others felt that a student who cannot be located, is not known to have died, returned to regular education, or withdrawn, can be assumed to have moved. The proposed dropout definition counts all students not included in the other categories. Therefore, eliminating the status unknown category would essentially add the students with status unknown to the count of dropouts. While the proposed change of the status unknown exit category to moved, not known to be continuing is included in the list of task force recommendations, further discussion may be required on this issue.

- ***Should the definition of a certificate of completion be revised?***

It came to the attention of the exiting task force that some IEPs are specifying GED receipt as a projected outcome of a student's special education program and that some students with disabilities are taking GED examinations while still enrolled in school. GED programs are supposed to operate through adult education programs and only serve students who have already dropped out of school. However, in order to accurately reflect the exiting status of those students who take a GED without dropping out, the task force recommends expanding the current definition of graduation with a certificate to include these students.

Task Force Recommendations Regarding Data Elements

Based on the discussions of the task force, the group had several recommendations for changing the data elements collected by OSEP, including the addition of several new data elements and revisions to several current data elements. The goals of these revisions are to make the OSEP data comparable with other measures of completion collected by NCES and the Census Bureau and to provide more accurate, detailed information to policy makers regarding the exiting status of students with disabilities (see attachment C for draft instructions and form for reporting exiting data as proposed).

1. Add a count of students who died.

2. Alter the definition of a dropout to include students who were enrolled on December 1 of the previous year, are not currently enrolled, and did not exit through any of the other defined bases.

3. Add a count of students who returned to regular education.

4. Alter the definition of graduation with a certificate to include students who received a GED through a secondary school program.

The task force felt that further discussion was required on the issue of students who moved and were not known to be continuing their education. While recommendation 5A is used in the prototype of the instructions and forms, this issue requires additional thought and consideration.

5A. Replace the status unknown category with a new category called moved, not known to be continuing.

5B. Eliminate the category previously called status unknown.

In addition to discussing the actual data elements, the task force also discussed ways of analyzing the OSEP exiting data to increase its effectiveness in informing stakeholders and shaping policy.

- ***Should OSEP change the denominator used for computing dropout and graduation proportions?***

Currently, OSEP computes its dropout and completion proportions using the number of exiters as a denominator. All of the other agencies collecting data on high school completion or dropouts use some count of total membership as the denominator in computing rates. Therefore, in order to make the figures more comparable, the task force considered whether OSEP should use a different denominator in computing dropout and completion proportions.

OSEP conducts a census of students with disabilities on December 1 of each year. Therefore, the task force felt that this December 1 child count would best serve as a denominator in computing rates.

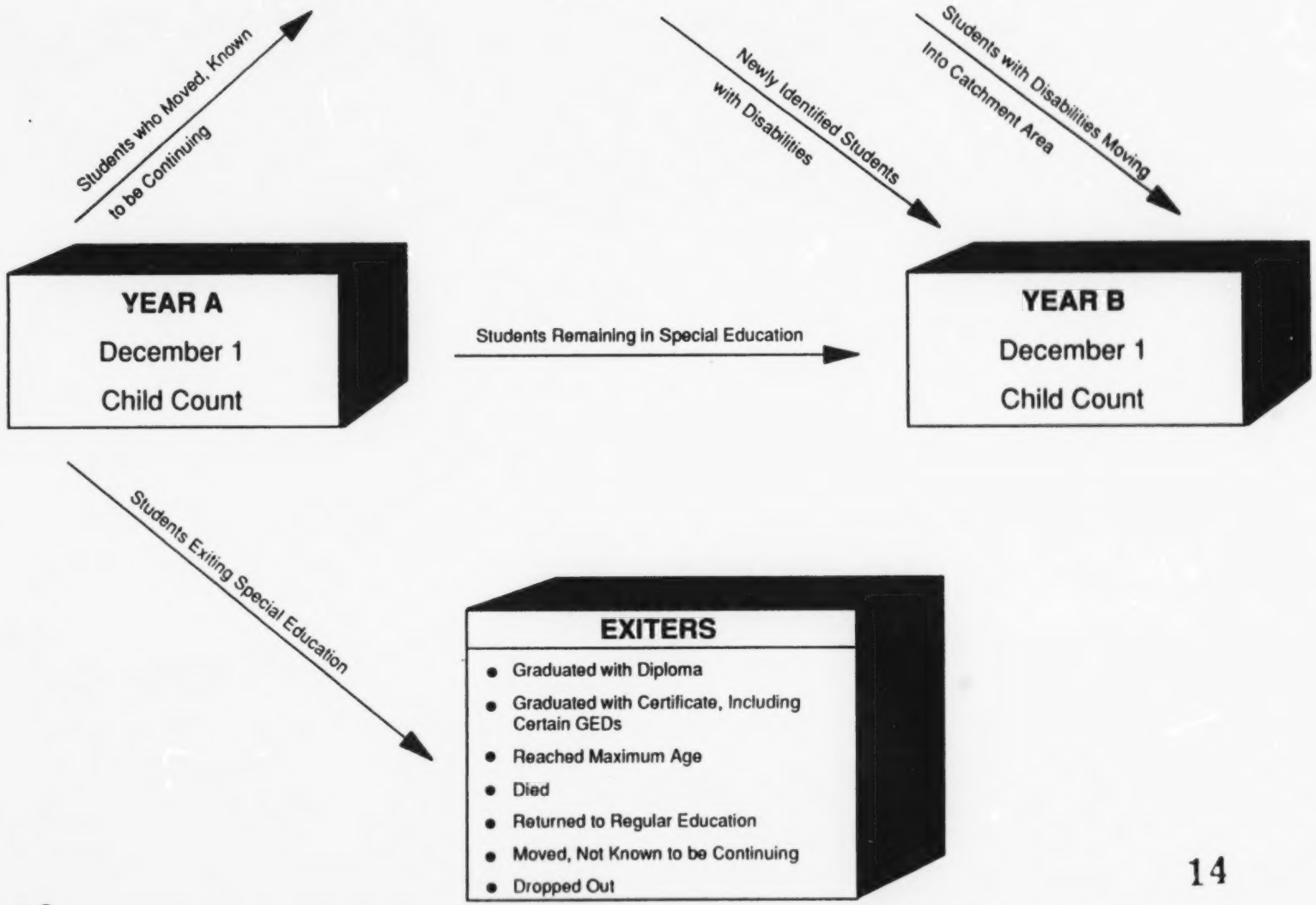
Using child count as a denominator introduces students who remained in special education and students who returned to regular education into the denominator. By adding a returned to regular education exit category, those students not exiting through any of the described bases can be assumed to have remained in special education. This allows policy makers to account for the educational status of a much larger population of students than is currently the case, as shown in figure 1. In addition, the data on dropout and completion rates would be more comparable with NCES dropout figures.

Under the current OSEP data collection, students remaining in school are not included in the denominator for calculating graduation or dropout proportions. The child count denominator would be significantly larger than the denominator currently used, all exiting students. However, the number of students exiting would be unchanged except for the addition of those students returning to regular education. Using the child count denominator, the proportion of students (especially those ages 14, 15, and 16) leaving under each basis would be smaller than in the past. The task force believes it is important to point out the differences between the rates computed under the current system and those computed under the proposed system so graduation and dropout rates will not be misinterpreted as having changed dramatically from one year to the next.

Using the child count from the previous December 1 to calculate the dropout and completion rates for the year would require that students exiting special education be counted from December 1 to November 30, rather than over the course of a school year. Because the child count is conducted on December 1, moving the exiting count dates guarantees that students in the numerator (exiters) are also in the denominator (child count). To further this goal, only students recorded on the December 1 child count would be included in the exit count. That is, students with disabilities who moved into the district or State, or students who were newly referred to special education after December 1 would not

Figure 1

Model for Tracking Students with Disabilities



be counted as exiters if they left special education between the time of arrival and December 1 of the following year.

A draft of the instructions and form for reporting exiting data under the proposed system is included in attachment C.

- ***How might the proposed exiting data be analyzed?***

The proposed data collection will permit the calculation of age-specific and cumulative dropout rates. For example, analysis of the data will produce an age-specific dropout rate; for all students age 14 on December 1 of year A, x percent dropped out over the course of one year. However, students are at risk of dropping out not only at one specific age, but at each age. The age-specific rates may be combined so that for a new group of 14 year olds, OSEP can compute a cumulative rate for the entire age span included in secondary school (14-21). That is, of a group of students with disabilities age 14, x percent will drop out in year 1 (at age 14); of the remaining students finishing year 1, y percent will drop out in year 2 (at age 15); of those who completed years 1 and 2, z percent will drop out in year 3 (at age 16), and so on through year 8 (age 21), resulting in an overall 8-year combined dropout rate. This process for computing age-specific and cumulative dropout rates may also be used to compute similar graduation or completion rates.

Task Force Recommendations Regarding Analysis

6. Use the December 1 child count from the previous year as the denominator in computing rates.

7. Change the time period covered by the data collection from September - June, to December 1 - November 30.

What are proposed uses of the data as revised?

Data may be used to identify problems, to evaluate programs, to document changes over time or across jurisdictions. The OSEP exiting data may be used by Federal, State, and local officials for any or all of these purposes. The proposed revisions to the OSEP exiting data will permit comparisons with dropout and completion rates for non-disabled students, something not possible under the current system. Also, with improvements in the comparability of data across States, differences from one jurisdiction to another may be more meaningful than at present. One of the difficulties in changing any data system, and the OSEP exiting data are no exception, is that changes over time will be difficult to interpret if the analysis includes pre- and post-revision data.

There are several specific uses of the revised data that the task force discussed. One intended use would be to supplement the NCES data collection. While students with disabilities may be included in the NCES pilot data collection, the data are not broken out by disabled and non-disabled individuals. The proposed OSEP data collection could provide a comparison between the general population and a subpopulation that is assumed to have an especially high dropout rate.

The OSEP exiting data could also be used to improve other dropout and graduation data collected by Federal agencies. For example, in some States, data for the Department of Education's State Performance Report do not include students with disabilities in counts of graduates, making the data incomparable across States. Other States award standard high school diplomas to students who meet modified graduation requirements while others award modified diplomas. By collecting information on students with disabilities exiting special education and using child count as the denominator in calculating graduation rates, the OSEP data could be used to supplement the State Performance Report data in those States that exclude students with disabilities from their graduation counts. This would improve the comparability of the graduation data presented on the performance chart.

Requests for Input

OSEP recognizes the time required for State and local education agencies to implement changes in data collection and reporting. In addition, OSEP is interested in soliciting feedback from stakeholders on the benefits and costs of operationalizing the changes proposed by the task force. Therefore, OSEP is requesting that agencies affected by the proposed changes or those who have potential uses for the OSEP exiting data respond to the following set of questions.

- Are these data that would be useful at the State and local levels?
- Are there particular factors that would impede collection of proposed data elements?
- How much additional burden would accompany proposed changes?

OSEP intends to discuss the proposed changes at several upcoming meetings, including a meeting of the State directors of special education and the State special education data managers. The tentative schedule for review and implementation of the proposed changes is as follows.

March 1991	Annual Conference on the Management of Federal/ State Data Systems--review by State data managers
April 1991	OSEP Meeting of State Directors of Special Education--review by State directors
May/June 1991	Site visits to assess the feasibility of implementing proposed changes in data collection
1992-93	Transition year--overlap between new data collection and old data collection. School year 1992-93 data collected under old system, December 1992-December 1993 data collected under new system.
December 1993	New data collection in place

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ATTACHMENT A

DESCRIPTIONS OF CURRENT DROPOUT AND GRADUATION STATISTICS

Each year, in accordance with Section 618 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, OSEP collects data from States on the number of students with disabilities age 14 and older exiting the educational system. The data are collected by age, disability, and basis of exit:

Graduation with diploma includes students who exited an educational program through receipt of a high school diploma identical to that for which non-disabled students are eligible.

Graduation with certificate includes students who exited an educational program through receipt of a certificate of completion, modified diploma, fulfillment of an IEP, or some similar mechanism.

Reached maximum age for service includes students who exited the educational system as a consequence of reaching the maximum age for receipt of special education services and did not receive a diploma/certificate of completion.

Dropped out includes students who exited the educational system as a consequence of dropping out of school--special education students who formally withdrew from school without completing the educational program. If no information is available as to whether a student has dropped out, the student should be reported in Status Unknown.

Status unknown includes students who exited the educational system but specific causes of departure could not be determined or were not known. Students who moved and are known to be continuing in school should not be included.

The proportions of students exiting through each basis are computed using the total number of exiters as the denominator.

NCES collects data from States to compute the graduation rate presented in this annual document. The figure is obtained by dividing the number of public high school graduates in each State by the public ninth grade enrollment four years earlier.

Ninth grade enrollments include a pro-rated portion of the secondary school students who were unclassified by grade and graduation rates are corrected for interstate population migration using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey

This monthly, nationally representative survey of households is supplemented once a year to collect data on high school completion. Data are collected on each member of the household. Respondents are asked if they were enrolled in school one year prior to the survey date, if they graduated, and if they are still enrolled. The number of dropouts for a given year is calculated by dividing the number of students who were enrolled in the previous year, are not currently enrolled, and did not graduate, by the number of persons who were enrolled in the previous year. This data collection provides the information necessary to compute a basic dropout rate; that is what proportion of those persons who were in school approximately one year ago are not in school one year later. The general computation formula for the 1-year rate from grade x is:

$$\frac{A}{A + B}$$

where: A = number of persons with grade x-1 completed who were enrolled in school last year and are not currently enrolled

B = number of persons with grade x completed who were enrolled last year and are currently enrolled

In computing the rate for twelfth grade, a modification is necessary, since many persons who successfully complete grade 12 will not be enrolled in the fall following graduation. In this case, the value for B is taken to be the number of persons who ere enrolled in the previous fall, and graduated in the spring (as determined from a question that asks high school graduates for their year of graduation).

The CPS data can also be used to compute 3-year rates, combining the dropout rates for grades 10, 11, and 12. For example, if the estimated grade specific rates were 3.7, 4.5, and 7.5 percent for a hypothetical group of 1,000 new 10th graders, about 37 would drop out in grade 10; of the remaining 963 who complete grade 10, 43 would drop out in grade 11; and of the remaining 920 students, about 69 would drop out in grade 12. The three-year combined dropout rate would be 149/1000 or 14.9 percent.

During the 1989-90 school year, NCES field tested a new data collection and reporting process to measure the number and rate of dropouts. NCES defines a dropout as an individual who:

1) was enrolled in school at some time in the previous school year;

2) was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year;

3) has not graduated from high school or completed a State- or district-approved educational program; and

4) does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:

- transfer to another public school district, private school, or State- or district-approved education program;
- temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or
- death.

NCES is also pilot testing three different denominators for calculating dropout proportions: student membership counts at the beginning of the school year, at the end of the school year, and in the fall of the following school year.

The NCES dropout data, which will be added to the Common Core of Data in 1991-92, will provide dropout information for grades 7-12 by ethnic group and gender. Data will be reported by districts, through State agencies, to NCES.

In order to determine the success of our schools in helping students complete a secondary education, there must be more comparable and complete data on high school graduates and other completers. Recommendations were made by the Council of Chief State School Officers' Education Data Improvement Project to the National Center for Education Statistics for improving the quality of the data collected on high school completers. A key recommendation focused on refining the definitions of the categories of completers currently collected in the Common Core of Data Surveys. The current definitions and the proposed refinements are listed below.

Regular Diploma Recipients

Count of individuals who received a regular diploma during the previous school year and subsequent summer school.

Refined Definition

Graduates who receive a Regular High School Diploma
Complete Carnegie units and performance requirements
Traditional High School Program
EXCLUDE: Non-tradition program completers
GED Tests Completers
Non-Regular Special Education Completers

Other Diploma Recipients

Count of individuals who received a diploma from other than the regular school program during the previous school year and subsequent summer school.

Refined Definition

Graduates who receive a High School Diploma
Complete Carnegie units and performance requirements
Non-Traditional or Alternative School Program
Only persons age 19 or younger
EXCLUDE: GED Tests Completers
Non-Regular Special Education Completers

High School Equivalency Recipients

Count of indivdiuals from this agency age 19 or younger who have received a high school equivalency certificate during the previous school year and subsequent summer.

Refined Definition

Persons age 19 or younger
High School Diploma or Certificate upon completion of the GED testing requirements and other State requirements
Previous calendar year

Other High School Completers

Count of individuals who have received a certificate of attendance or other certificate of completion in lieu of a diploma during the previous school year and subsequent summer school.

Refined Definition

Persons receiving an exiting credential for high school attendance or completion of a secondary program
Persons who failed to complete all requirements for a Regular High School Diploma
INCLUDE: Persons completing Special Education Programs with different requirements
EXCLUDE: GED Tests Completers

ATTACHMENT B

OSEP EXITING TASK FORCE PARTICIPANTS

TASK FORCE ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES EXITING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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ATTACHMENT C

DRAFT OF PROPOSED INSTRUCTIONS AND FORMS FOR COLLECTING OSEP EXITING DATA

TABLE 4

REPORT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXITING SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM DECEMBER 1, 1992 - NOVEMBER 30, 1993

Instructions

SECTION 618(b) OF P.L. 99-457 AUTHORIZES THE SECRETARY TO COLLECT SUCH INFORMATION AS IS NECESSARY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS ACT.

General Instructions

In Section A, provide a count of the number of children and youth with disabilities reported under Chapter 1, ESEA (SOP) and IDEA, Part B on the December 1 1992 child count who exited special education from December 1, 1992 to November 30, 1993. Data are to be provided by age, disability, and basis of exit. Only students who were included in the child count for December 1, 1992 should be included on this form.

Sampling Guidelines

One of two sampling plans may be employed. First, States may choose to collect data from all districts, sampling students within districts. Second, States may use a two-tiered sampling plan wherein districts are sampled and then students are sampled within districts.

In sampling districts, all districts over 25,000 ADM must be included in the sample and a random sample of the remaining districts over 500 ADM must be used.[2] The total number of districts sampled must equal 100; if the total number of districts in the State is 100 or less, data must be collected from all districts. For example, if a State has 700 school districts over 500 ADM and 10 districts with an ADM over 25,000, the 10 large districts must be included, and at least 90 of the remaining 690 districts must be included in the sample. It is recommended that every second, third, fourth, etc. district be included for ease of weighting the data collected. In the example noted, it is recommended that every seventh district be sampled, i.e., that 99 districts (690/90=7.67 or 7 -- round down to assure enough districts) be included in the random sample. Therefore, a total of 109 districts would be sampled for the State.

For student sampling, whether for all districts or for a sample of districts, data must be collected on each Federal disability. All students whose domicile is in a district must be candidates for the sample, including those students served in cooperatives and/or intermediate units or in residential programs out of the district. Districts with ADMs over 25,000 should sample 1/10 or 100 students (whichever is greater) of their students in each disability category. A minimum sample of 100 must be used by all districts except where the total number in a disability category is less than 100. In the latter case, data must be collected for all students in that category.

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[2]States with more than 25 districts with ADMs over 25,000 must include all districts over 50,000 ADM, and the remaining districts must be sampled.

In districts with ADMs under 25,000, where the child count for a Federal disability is over 400, 1/4 or 100 (whichever is greater) of the students with that condition must be sampled. Where the child count for a condition is under 400, data must be collected on a sample of 100 students; where there are fewer than 100 students in a category, data must be collected on all students.

Specific Instructions

Section A

In these tables, enter an unduplicated count of all children and youth with disabilities, by age category and disability, who were recorded on the 1992 December 1 child count and exited special education from December 1, 1992 to November 30, 1993. Students who were identified as needing special education or who moved into the catchment area after December 1, and therefore did not appear on the December 1 1992 child count, should NOT be recorded on this form. Place zeroes (0) in categories where no children have exited the program. Code (-9) for categories not used by the State.

Row A — Total who were served in special education on December 1 of 1992 but between December 1, 1992 and November 30, 1993 have returned to the regular education program either because they were:

- declassified;
- found ineligible for special education;
- were withdrawn from special education at a parent's request; or
- were returned to regular education for some other reason.

Row B — Total who exited an educational program through receipt of a high school diploma identical to that for which students without disabilities are eligible.

Row C — Total who exited an educational program through receipt of a certificate of completion, modified diploma, fulfillment of an IEP, or some similar mechanism. Also includes students who received a GED through a program administered by the school district (Do not include students who received a GED through an adult education program or students who returned to regular education after completing an IEP).

Row D — Total who exited special education as a consequence of reaching the maximum age for receipt of special education services--students with disabilities who reached the maximum age and did not receive a diploma/certificate of completion.

Row E — Total who died.

Row F — Total who moved out of the catchment area and are not known to be continuing in another educational program. Do not include in these counts students who moved and were known to be continuing their education in another catchment area.

Row G — Total who were enrolled on December 1 of 1992, were not enrolled on December 1, 1993, and did not exit through any of the other bases described.

Row H — Total of rows (A)-(G).

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PART III, TABLE 4

REPORT OF: (A) CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXITING
SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM DECEMBER 1, 1992 – NOVEMBER 30, 1993

SECTION A

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	MENTALLY RETARDATION								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	HEARING IMPAIRMENT								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									

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REPORT OF: (A) CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXITING
SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM DECEMBER 1, 1992 – NOVEMBER 30, 1993

SECTION A

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	DEAFNESS								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A-G)									

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A-G)									

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PART III, TABLE 4

REPORT OF: (A) CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXITING SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM DECEMBER 1, 1992 – NOVEMBER 30, 1993

SECTION A

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	VISUAL IMPAIRMENT								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	SERIOUS EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									

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PART III, TABLE 4

REPORT OF: (A) CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXITING
SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM DECEMBER 1, 1992 – NOVEMBER 30, 1993

SECTION A

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	ORTHOPEDIC IMPAIRMENT								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A-G)									

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENT								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A-G)									

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REPORT OF: (A) CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXITING SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM DECEMBER 1, 1992 – NOVEMBER 30, 1993

SECTION A

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	DEAF–BLINDNESS								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									

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REPORT OF: (A) CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXITING SPECIAL EDUCATION FROM DECEMBER 1, 1992 – NOVEMBER 30, 1993

SECTION A

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	MULTIPLE DISABILITIES								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									

BASIS OF EXIT:	DISABILITY/AGE								
	ALL DISABILITIES								
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22+
(A) RETURN TO REGULAR EDUCATION									
(B) GRADUATION WITH DIPLOMA									
(C) GRADUATION THROUGH CERTIFICATION									
(D) REACHED MAXIMUM AGE									
(E) DIED									
(F) MOVED, NOT KNOWN TO BE CONTINUING									
(G) DROPPED OUT									
(H) TOTAL (OF ROWS A–G)									